

end\dominos LTE
 April 5, 1990
 Domino theory

1. For SU, it did start with leaving Afghanistan: just as we feared it would start with leaving Vietnam.

--Why were we still in VN? For same reasons SU couldn't leave Afghan.

--Why did we go in VN? Probably for same reasons...

--Recall Gunnar Myrdal: SU took over East Europe because Stalin thought buffer space would be protection: WWII notion. And because of Germany. Sovs couldn't get out because revolt would extend to USSR itself.

2. What did G expect? Probably that his refusal to use force--outside USSR--would not be called so clearly or so soon, made so obvious, especially repeatedly.

Probably he thought (Kortunov) that satellite leaders, seeing the handwriting on the wall, would be flexible, move toward less repressive regimes and greater independence from Moscow, fuzz up their own--and Soviet--departure, making it look less rebellious, defiant, more a matter of their own initiative, not response to revolt or Soviet "betrayal." Thus they would not cause a run on the bank.

When this didn't happen, it was the masses, revolting, who tested the Soviets and found them reluctant. (Bulgaria, of all places, was perhaps the only leadership group that acted as Gorbachev expected; though Hungary may have been planning that. Or rather, one could say that the Polish Communists/Jaruselski and to a lesser extent (Poszgay almost won, but didn't) led.

When the leadership of East Germany and Czechoslovakia failed to bend and adapt and were snapped, the whole process speeded up in a way that focussed attention on G's reluctance to use force, or willingness to let go of empire. This raised immediate hopes in the Inner Empire. But that meant facing G's worst fear, or perhaps a contingency he hadn't even contemplated among his fears: widespread inner "stirrings" of revolt "blossoming" before perestroika had improved growth rates to a point where he could buy off revolt with material incentives to remain in the empire.

3. Everything that is happening to G and SU now is what USG feared, confronting Indochina 1949-50 and later, Korea, Iran, Guatemala, Cuba, DomRep, --and Turkey/Greece 1947? Berlin, Taiwan Straits. Middle East? Iran, Nicaragua, 1979.

4. Note how we explained these fears to ourselves (similar to

Sovs!): vulnerable developing countries (WWR), outside agitators and foreign ideology, small minorities, use of terror by insurgents, external sanctuaries and external supplies from the Great Satan; nervous indigenous allies, needing reassurance...

5. Analogy to bank credit; no need to cover all deposits simultaneously, so long as a "run" can be avoided. Consideration: prepare for 1-1/2 wars, 2-1/2, etc.? Mobility vs. bases; alliances;

--Thus, concern with "credibility" (of threats, promises); including ability to master our own domestic forces, to deliver on threats and promises.

6. Both countries, US and SU, with an "anti-imperial" core ideology, identity. WTO as "alliance"; Afghan as "anti-imperialist" war, help to friendly socialist country (really believed). (Many didn't see Czech that way: anguish, but fait accompli. Likewise Hungary? or not?)

So US emphasizes "informal empire" from beginning. Empire of Free Trade (Semmel; WAWilliams); Open Door. Sincere belief--with much authoritative analysis (Adam Smith? Ricardo?) supporting it--that this is a) best for everyone, efficient (with theory that efficiency is moral, only valid interpersonal definition of morality for economists...welfare theory); b) the best or only way to ensure international peace, lack of which led to World War II; so that failure to uphold it would "lead to World War III, which would be on our consciences"; 4) best or only way to modernization, development.

Thus, if "insistence" on Open Door seemed to lead to opposing self-determination, it nevertheless was in the true interest of the immediate victims, or at least--if these victims paid a high and permanent price for their revolt that cancelled out prospects of development for them--in the interests of all those who would be taught not to deviate by this example.

7. To sustain adequate credibility: a) Prevent revolt, if necessary by repression; b) Sustain this policy by economic policy, alliances, bases, relations with military, military aid, diplomacy, and if necessary covert action; encouraging coups and tyranny, death squads, as necessary; c) if necessary, intervene, preferably (first) with air "support," advisors, then troops; d) in order of preference: win fast; win slow; stalemate (eventually, cheaply); damage country badly; negotiate mutual withdrawal, compromise, which leaves part of country in friendly hands. (as in SVN, 1954)

Anything worse than this is never really contemplated or accepted by leaders; if it comes (Laos, Cambodia, SVN) it is clearly not "chosen," not even prepared for: "unacceptable" (accepting cost of presiding over a debacle: unlike Afghan). "Good

doctor is a bad loser."

Decent interval approach (which SU seems to have won in Afghan, without having insisted on it as a condition of leaving!) (including building up a viable set of indigenous leaders to succeed us) considered by Kissinger (while LBJ is still President) but never considered or implemented by Nixon: who nevertheless encouraged the impression that that was his--obviously, necessarily ambiguous!--strategy, as a cover for his secret aims and secret operations and threats.

7. We had our own Brezhnev doctrine, limiting the sovereignty and self-determination of nations in our sphere ("Free World!"): but this was secret, and each instance of combat intervention (our covert actions being denied) was presented as support for self-determination, against external aggression, including "covert aggression" (WWR).

The Soviet Brezhnev Doctrine bore the burden of being relatively explicit. What was covert, in our case, were the criteria that would really trigger our covert action or, if necessary, combat intervention: i.e., the criteria beyond external attack or openly Communist insurgency ("covert aggression, supported by SU"). The latter criteria amounted to Ideology II, for the bureaucrats; this also allowed for "exceptional" cases of intervention, depending on history, misunderstanding, idiosyncrasies or impulses of leaders (DomRep).

The covert Ideology III of the leaders amounted to the requirement of multilateral trade relations, the Open Door, and to a secondary extent, free enterprise internally: in particular, no nationalization of oil or other key resources (copper)!

The fact that self-determination for others, especially in the Third World, above all in Central America and the Caribbean (and covertly, the Middle East), is a very subordinate value or objective is a closely-held secret part of Ideology III. (That we do not "allow" Communist takeover is relatively open, not only part of Ideology II but verging on being part of our official, public, mass Ideology I: what JFK was referring to in his Inaugural Address...bear any burden, guardian at the gates, what you can do...

Likewise for the very subordinate role--or even antipathy--for democracy in Third World countries, where this has any risk of loosening US control or of closing even partially the Open Door. (Antipathy to potential regimes that are clearly not Communist or foreign-influenced--nationalists of right or left, protectionists, nationalizers (like Mossadegh, Muslim!), liberals, socialists, New Dealers--is explained to officials holding Ideology II, or the public if it finds out the US stance, as (perhaps exaggerated, "but that's the way I am, and I'm the President and you're not": LBJ in

DomRep) fear that they will allow an opening for later Communist subversion: e.g., for lifting a ban on the Communist Party (Bosch), accepting even unsolicited support from Communist Party (Mossadegh) or allowing Communists to hold lesser ministries (Arbenz; Allende?).

8. For each empire, the existence and the activities of the other did exacerbate the domino fear significantly, and worsen the problem of "credibility." If one backed off, it could be interpreted as being for a reason that would apply elsewhere as well: fear of intervention by the other. For that reason, the relative balance between the two, or rather, perceptions of this by others, affected the "threat" to one's empire: fundamentally, a threat of revolt, of unravelling, of contagion of rebellion or liberty.

In that sense, the stance of the SU--providing sanctuary, some recognition, supplies, advisors, money, arms, and potentially direct combat support, in the area of conflict or elsewhere (horizontal escalation)--all the functions admired by leftists, anti-imperialists--also rationalizes the US counterrevolutionary efforts, especially the scale and urgency of them, and the US fears of contagion, dominos, loss of credibility, making it harder for the US to let go and easier for the US to use harsh and expensive measures of repression!

This "cost" to prospects of liberation of the SU stance of "solidarity" must be dismissed by admirers of this aspect of SU policy (who now regret, deplore, mourn its impending departure) as insignificant, because the US would intervene just as widely, quickly and brutally if the SU opponent did not exist (would Chomsky not say this?)

But is that entirely true? We may have a chance to find out soon. Certainly the US did not need, and did not enjoy, the spectre of a Soviet threat to invade Panama. But El Salvador; Nicaragua? (With friendly regimes asking us in--as in Vietnam--into Central America, or the Philippines, a Soviet role may not be necessary).